These three Departments met on the same day, and on 30th December, they laid before the War Cabinet a series of proposals for providing the guns wanted, and arrangements were agreed for carrying out most of these plans.

We also took in hand immediately the question of not merely arming our merchant ships but of providing those already armed with guns of a longer range. As I have already stated, this question was raised by Admiral Jellicoe at the War Committee held in November, 1916, and it was then reported by the representatives of the Admiralty that 3,000 guns, 12-pounder size and upwards, preferably four-inch were required. But the guns that had been ordered for the purpose were only being delivered at the rate of 80 a month. This was obviously inadequate and much greater drive had to be put into the supply of the heavier and the longer range type of gun for our merchant ships.

Bigger and better guns

The progress achieved by these measures in the arming of merchantmen can be briefly indicated by the following figures :—

Statistics of WS-By

From the outbreak of the Great War until the 9th December, 1916, the date on which the first meeting of my new War Cabinet was held, the total number of merchant vessels that had been armed was 2,500. By 1st January, 1917, this number had been increased to 1,420 (of which 83 had been

lost). The quarterly increases during 1917 were as follows :—

Number of British Merchant Ships armed with guns [excluding howitzers].
January 1, 1917 ..
1,420